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The findings of recent research studies and current school practices were formulated in terms of guidelines which schools could use as criteria in strengthening their provisions for helping students make the most of their learning potential. Underachievement is an increasingly serious educational problem. It results in failure to complete high school, to qualify for or to find employment. The school could play a key role in helping students to attain their full achievement potential. Underachievers could be identified in the early grades. A program of standardized testing and a system of records should be maintained. Symptoms of emotional problems and information on the pupils' cultural background could also serve as clues to understanding underachievers.

Many practices were suggested for the prevention and correction of underachievement. Program extensions during summer months or after school would be useful. Special help should be given for culturally handicapped children and corrective instruction provided for other specialized problems. Counseling and guidance services would be very useful both in identification and correction of underachievement beginning in the early grades. Cooperation with all community organizations concerned with the education or adjustment of youth would be valuable. The help of parents should also be sought. Administrative leadership including related in-service education to develop an all-school concern and understanding of the problem of underachievement would be essential to the success of a preventive and corrective program.

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PREVENTION AND CORRECTION OF UNDERACHIEVEMENT

Implications of
Recent Research and Current Practice

* IMPORTANCE OF PROBLEM
* IDENTIFICATION OF UNDERACHIEVERS
* PREVENTION AND CORRECTION
* SCHOOL AND COMMUNITY RESOURCES

BAY AREA EDUCATIONAL RESEARCH SERVICE
OFFICES: ALAMEDA COUNTY STATE COLLEGE
HAYWARD, CALIFORNIA (TEL: 538-8000)

SINGLE COPY - $1.00
JUNE, 1963

FOREWORD

This bulletin was developed in response to the request of many members of BAERS for a study of ways in which schools can effectively reduce underachievement among students which for many leads to school dropout, unemployment, delinquency and poor overall adjustment. The study was authorized by the Board of Directors of BAERS at its meeting of January 15, 1963.

For the study, the findings of recent research studies and current school practices were studied and their implications formulated in terms of guidelines which schools can use as criteria in strengthening their provisions for helping students make the most of their learning potential. Twenty-one such criteria are identified and described.

The work of developing this report was done cooperatively by the committee of BAERS' members listed on the next page. Many helpful suggestions were received from the general membership of BAERS in response to a tentative draft of the report sent to them in April. On May 27, 1963, the report was approved for publication by the Board of Directors.

The aim of this report is to help schools utilize the findings of research and experience related to the prevention and correction of underachievement. As a further service to this end, a follow-up report on practices found to be useful by the members of BAERS will be prepared during the school year 1963-64.

ALBERT GRANT
Executive Director
Bay Area Educational Research Service

June, 1963

* * * * * * *

The Bay Area Educational Research Service (BAERS) is a school-study council whose member school districts and county offices of education make cooperative studies of educational problems of mutual concern.

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PREVENTION AND CORRECTION OF UNDERACHIEVEMENT

Policy and Procedure Implications of Recent Research and Current Practice

1. Importance of Problem of Underachievement

Underachievement in the form of definite failure on the part of many elementary and secondary school students, of all levels of ability, to achieve reasonably well in relation to their potential is an increasingly serious educational problem in practically all schools and communities. Effective provisions for dealing with this problem are urgently needed in order to forestall the long-term ill effects which underachievement has upon the students themselves, their families, and communities.

As a first step in the development of corrective provisions of the type mentioned, it is helpful to consider some of the known facts regarding incidence of underachievement and the nature of its consequences. A brief summary of these facts follows:

Failure to Complete High School. Failure to complete the requirements for high school graduation is a common by-product of underachievement. According to one NEA study, (34, p.236) one out of every three students drops out of school without achieving a high school diploma and thereby severely restricts his opportunities for employment and other types of useful and satisfying experience.

Failure to Qualify for Employment. The net effects of underachievement usually include failure to acquire the skills and background training needed for employment in today's labor force. This is becoming increasingly true as more and more unskilled and semi-skilled work is done by machines rather than by human beings. The situation is summarized as follows by a report of the NEA: "Whereas in 1900 skilled industrial laborers, service workers, and farm workers accounted for 59 percent of the total labor force, by 1950 this total had dropped to 28.9 percent. By 1965 it is expected to be 24.4 percent, and by 1975, 22.1 percent. Every decrease in these percentages is matched by an increase in the percentage of skilled workers, technicians, clerical workers and professional people." (25, p.3).

Failure to Prepare for College. Because of underachievement, many able students fail to qualify for college admission even though they do complete high school. For example, a study of 4,900 "bright" high school students recently conducted in New York City reports that 54 percent of the boys and 33 percent of the girls had scholastic averages which half way through high school, were already so low that their admission to college was already in doubt. (30)

Failure to Get a College Education. Among the high-school graduates that do qualify for college admission, underachievement often results in failure to complete the work even though they have the ability and financial resources for doing so. For example, a study by Wolfe (38) shows that of the high school students who rank third in intellectual ability, 40 percent do not enter college, and 60 percent of those who enter do not finish college.

Failure to Find Employment. According to the report of the recent conference on Unemployment of Out-of-School Youth in Urban Areas (24), school drop-outs find it particularly difficult to secure employment. The unemployment rate for the 16 through 20 age group is over twice the national rate for all age brackets.

The rate of unemployment among boys who have dropped out of schools is three times higher than among high school graduates. (24) Among minority groups, the rate is much higher. Conant (4) reports that in a slum section, composed almost entirely of negroes, of one of our largest cities, 59 percent of the male youth between 16 and 21 were out of school and unemployed.

In addition to the above by-products of underachievement, there are other intangible consequences including unhappiness and failure to achieve satisfactory personal fulfillment. Psychologists generally agree that definite failure to achieve in accord with one's potential is positively correlated with poor adjustment to life. For example, Maslow (19, p.95) writes that mature and psychologically healthy persons are ones who have retained and developed all their human capacities. He states that, "probably there are true psychopathological effects when cognitive needs are frustrated."

Although many factors beyond the control of the school are responsible for underachievement, the school plays a key role in helping students to achieve fully in relation to their potential and can undoubtedly improve its performance in this regard. For example, studies of school drop-outs show that many have a history of academic failure from the earliest grades, but the schools did not spot their problem until it was too late.

Fortunately, many schools have recently developed an increased awareness of the problem of underachievement and have initiated numerous studies and programs aimed at correcting or at least alleviating the situation. Although these studies and programs have not produced clear cut answers, the findings constitute the best available basis for planning preventive and corrective measures. The remainder of this publication attempts to summarize these findings and to formulate their practical implications for schools that wish to strengthen their programs for fostering maximum development on the part of all students.

II. WAYS OF IDENTIFYING UNDERACHIEVERS

A. Highlights of Research Related to Indentification of Underachievers

Many recently-published reports of research, expert opinion, and current school practice contain information that is pertinent to the problem of identifying potential and actual underachievers. A survey of these reports reveals the following findings of importance for the planning of a program for the indentification of such students.

1. Definition of Underachievement. For practical purposes, the underachiever is probably best defined as one whose performance, as judged by marks or achievement test scores, is significantly below his measured or demonstrated potential for academic achievement. For research purposes, a more rigorous delineation is required, but for workers concerned with the practical problems of identifying, understanding, and helping underachievers, it constitutes a satisfactory working definition. - Shaw (35, p.13)

2. Materials Needed for Identification. The basic materials needed for identification include intelligence tests; achievement tests; checklists or inventories of interests, habits and experience; cumulative records of various kinds; and teacher observation and judgment. - Mitchell (22, p.29)

3. Many Techniques Required. Although many statistical techniques for identifying underachievers by comparing pupils' capacity and achievement test scores have been suggested, none has been found to be completely satisfactory. - Robinson (33, p.16)

   Some aspects of underachievement can best be identified through standardized tests; others require the use of informal procedures; and still others require a combined approach. - Sister M. Julitta (31, p.25)

4. Cultural Background Affects Learning. Pupils whose cultural background is limited, or markedly different from the norm, are thereby hampered in their efforts to achieve in accord with their potential. - Reissman (32, p.115)

5. Early Identification Possible. As early as the primary grades, it is usually possible to identify some of the pupils who, unless an effective preventive program is instituted, will become underachievers. - Allen (1, p.22) According to Shaw and McCuen (36) this is more true for boys than for girls. Underachieving boys show this behavior in the earliest grades while few girls show this characteristic. Girls, in general, begin to show serious underachieving behavior in their late elementary or junior high school grades.

6. Emotional Adjustment Affects Learning. As a group, underachievers have many emotional problems although not all children that have such problems are underachievers. Underachievers generally are more negative in their attitudes toward themselves than are achievers. Also, they tend to be more negative in their evaluations of others. - Miller (21,p.23)

7. Underachievement More Common Among Boys. The incidence of underachievement is greater among boys than among girls. For example, Shaw (35, p.22) reports that approximately half of all males who are above average in ability may be considered underachievers, whereas, the corresponding figure for girls is 25 percent.

8. Many Types of Underachievers. Shaw (35, p.20) points out that there are many types of underachievers. For example, some get low marks but high achievement test scores; others get high marks but low achievement test scores. Some are chronic underachievers; others are occasional underachievers; however, most underachievers at the high school level have been underachievers from an early age.

9. Help of Specialized Personnel Needed. The identification and diagnosis of some underachievers requires the help of specialized personnel, including psychologist, counselor, school nurse, and social worker. - Hardin (12, p.146)

B. Implications of Research on Identification of Underachievers

The above conclusions together with other information available from a recent NEA Survey (28) of the ways in which schools throughout the United States are endeavoring to help underachievers suggest the following to be worthwhile as identification procedures.

1. Begin Identification Process in Early Grades

The process of identifying underachievers should begin as soon as the child enters school. By being alert to the personal, social, and psychological factors which lead to underachievement in school work, particularly reading, kindergarten and primary teachers can identify the child who may not succeed in accord with his ability unless identified early and given proper assistance in the form of corrective or enrichment activity.

When parents register a child for kindergarten, information on any factors in which background which might handicap his learning progress in school should be secured although extensive inquiry at registration may not be appropriate. When school starts, teachers can get additional information by watching for behavior typically associated with underachievement, e.g. undue immaturity, extreme shyness, limiting cultural environment, speech handicaps, physical handicaps, and emotional difficulties. Fortunately, the procedure which many districts use for evaluating the progress of kindergarten children includes observation of the factors mentioned and others. The "Kindergarten Record of Individual Growth" used by the San Francisco School District for such evaluations is a good example.

Similar provision for identifying potential underachievement can be made in the first and other primary grades. Furthermore, as the child begins to read and do arithmetic, the teacher should also be alert to any signs of underachievement. To some extent, such signs can be identified by comparing the child's achievement and mental ability as measured by standardized tests, but the findings should be supplemented by other data. For example, check lists of skills and abilities required by the pupil at each of the levels in the primary grades can be developed and used to note specific deficiencies which may later result in underachievement unless corrected.

It should be emphasized that the underachiever in early as well as later grades is not necessarily the pupil whose work is below grade level. Some pupils may be meeting grade expectancy but still be achieving significantly below their potential. The causes for this may be within the pupil himself, or they may be due to lack of challenging school experiences. In any case, the

identification process should pick out such pupils as well as those who despite their potential are performing below grade level.

2. Secure Information on Pupils' Cultural Background

Underachievement is sometimes culturally or environmentally produced. Children from homes and communities in which the culture is markedly different from or more limited than what is presumed by the school program are handicapped in their school learning. For purposes of identifying potential and actual underachievers and diagnosing their particular educational needs, it is generally helpful to secure and have available information on each pupils's cultural background in regard to factors such as the following:

a. Organization of home and family life, i.e. bi-lingual, broken homes, foster parents, etc.

b. Education of parents, and family attitude toward learning.

c. Membership and status within a minority group.

d. Neighborhood environment.

The interpretation and utilization of information on pupils' cultural background should be done with much care less the process result in accepting superficial reasons and making a "pat diagnosis." In some cases, it is helpful for teachers to meet in a group to study and interpret the data, particularly if the help of specialized personnel such as a school psychologist or social worker is available.

3. Maintain a Program of Standardized Testing

Standardized tests are, of course, one helpful means of securing objective information on a pupil's learning capacity and achievement status and of determining whether the latter is significantly lower than the former. Certainly, maintenance of a systematic plan of achievement and intelligence testing is an essential element in a school district's program regarding underachievement.

If possible, the plan should include provision for individual psychological testing by a qualified psychologist of pupils needing follow-up study. For example, it is desirable, though costly, to give individual tests to first grade pupils who fall below the 25th percentile on a group test of reading readiness, particularly if this rating seems definitely lower than the teacher's observation indicates. In the early grades, individual psychological examination, if feasible, is generally perferable to group testing. With some groups it is highly desirable to use "culture free" tests in order to distinguish low scores attributable to the pupils' divergent cultural background.

In addition to the tests required in grades, 5, 8 and 11 under California law, it is desirable to administer group tests of achievement and intelligence in other grades. For example, give a test of reading readiness at the end of kindergarten or the beginning of first grade. Also administer tests of reading in grades below fifth. Many districts find it helpful to secure consultant help from the staff of the County Office of Education in planning a testing program that is coordinated with the required, State testing program.

Some schools which have the services of a school psychologist have found it helpful for purposes of diagnosis to give tests of visual perception, visual memory, and auditory perception to pupils who are potential or actual underachievers in reading. The following are among the tests that are used for this purpose.

Marianne Frostig Developmental Test of Visual Perception
7257 Melrose Avenue
Los Angeles 46, California

Memory for Designs Test
Box 1441
Missoula, Montana

Bender Motor Visual Gestalt Test
Psychological Corporation
New York 17, N. Y.

Wepman Auditory Discrimination Test
University of Chicago Press
Chicago 37, Illinois

4. Analyze Test Ratings for Evidence of Pupil Underachievement

The plan for a systematic program of standardized testing recommended above should include provision for interpretation of the findings in order to identify students whose ratings on the achievement test are significantly below their intelligence test ratings. One practical procedure which can be used by the individual classroom teacher to secure this information consists of making a scattergram of the two sets of scores being compared. This will show graphically which pupils are underachievers in the sense that their achievement ratings are definitely lower than their intelligence ratings.

Some schools will also want to make a statistical analysis of the data using one of the accepted techniques for comparing the scores on the two types of tests and for interpreting the results. A description of possible procedures for doing this can be found in most standard textbooks on educational measurements. Winkley (37, p.155) provides an excellent evaluative description of such procedures as applied to reading.

In addition to whatever statistical procedure the district employs, each teacher should go over her own class' tests. If teachers do not understand how to interpret test profiles and scattergrams, help should be provided possibly through the general supervisor, principal, psychologist, etc.

Tests alone cannot be depended upon as a tool for selecting all pupils who are underachievers. For example, some I.Q. tests may yield a spuriously low rating if reading is a problem area for a child. In some cases, supplementary or alternate methods must be used. Nevertheless, if suitable account is taken of their limitations, tests are one valuable means of identifying pupils who are not performing up to their potential, providing the personnel using them for this purpose have adequate preparation.

5. Supplement Test Scores With Other Information

Some of the information needed to identify potential and actual underachievers cannot be secured by means of standardized tests. Other techniques including direct observation and informal inventories must be used to secure information on the pupil's health, behavior, speech, interests, and personality characteristics, including self-concept. The pupil's school marks and achievement on teacher-made room tests are helpful.

Supplementary information of the type mentioned can, as a rule, be secured by the teacher who sees the pupil every day in a variety of circumstances and can confer with him informally as need be. For example, casual conversation can often reveal evidence of the child's inferior opinion of himself, poor study habits, limited background, and emotional difficulties arising from tensions at home and in school. Several recent publications such as Driscoll's How to Study the Behavior of Children, (8) contain specific suggestions on how to observe children's behavior objectively.

In general, teachers are usually successful in gathering information to supplement test data, but they vary in the ability to interpret their significance. If possible, related professional guidance and in-service education should be provided. Also, it is essential that supplementary information as well as test data be collated and maintained in a cumulative record.

6. Watch for Symptoms of Emotional Problems

Emotional and social problems are prevalent among underachievers; hence the school should be alert to any evidences of emotional and social maladjustments. From a knowledge of the child's past history and through day-to-day observation of behavior at various times and in varied situations, the experienced teacher can spot pupils who have emotional problems. Some teachers can successfully use such techniques as sociograms to learn more about children's feelings about themselves and others.

Through use of the techniques mentioned, and others that are described in related professional books, teachers can secure much information which will help them understand their students and use this understanding in their planning of how to teach. Furthermore, teachers can help to identify the pupils who have serious difficulty and should be referred to a qualified diagnostician.

7. Make Periodic Check for General Symptoms of Underachievement

In addition to applying the procedures already suggested, it is desirable to make a periodic check of pupils in the upper elementary grades for characteristics such as the following that usually denote underachievement and the probability of drop out:

a. Is two years older than his classmates
b. Has a poor attendance or tardiness record
c. Resists aggressively the authority of the teacher or principal
d. Has little or no interest in school.
e. Is not able financially to do what the rest of the group does
f. Is not in any extracurricular activities
g. Is passed on to the next grade on trial because of low marks
h. Has weaknesses in specific academic subjects such as reading and mathematics
i. Tends to withdraw

Near the end of the school year, when the pupil's program for the next year is being planned, a systematic summary of pupil's status in regard to factors such as the above and those described earlier in this report is helpful. An informal check list including the above items will facilitate the noting of symptoms, particularly in grades six and above where these factors become more apparent.

8. Make Diagnostic Study of Underachievers

The process of identifying underachievement should include diagnosis of the difficulty so that a corrective or supplemental program specifically related to the cause can be initiated immediately.

A comprehensive diagnostic study must include a study of the student's physical, emotional and social development, as well as his intellectual ability since all of these factors affect his learning capacity. Such a diagnosis may require the services of specialists such as a psychologist, a physician, a psychiatrist, a neurologist or an ophthalmologist. Intensive case studies of this type are costly and time-consuming; hence, as a rule, must be reserved for severe cases.

Teachers, particularly if given some professional help, can do much to secure the diagnostic information needed to formulate an improvement program for pupils who are mild underachievers, i.e. those who in the primary grades are one or two grades below expectancy and two or three years in the upper grades. The techniques of identification already described should be used to secure such information.

9. Maintain a System of Up-to-Date Records and Summaries

Records of each pupil's personal characteristics and educational history are essential for the identification of underachievers and the planning of preventive and corrective actions. These records should include cumulative information on the results of previous endeavors to assess achievement in relation to capacity and to overcome significant disparities between the two. Individual cumulative records should be developed.

Some teachers find it helpful to develop a survey chart which provides a profile of the class members individually and as a group in regard to such factors as intelligence, achievement, behavior deviations, cultural deficiencies, and special instructional needs. Such a chart has been developed by the Cupertino Union Elementary School District of Cupertino, California.

10. Use Team Approach

As far as possible, the process of identifying potential and actual under-achievers should be planned and carried out cooperatively on the part of all the school staff members who either know the pupils concerned or have specialized skills in interpreting pupil-personnel information. Small school districts which have no specialized personnel can generally secure some help from the office of the County Superintendent. In any case, leadership of the school principal is particularly essential.

III. Prevention and Correction of Underachievement

A. Highlights of Research Related to Prevention and Correction of Underachievement

Many recently-published reports of research, expert opinion, and current practice contain information that relates to the problem of the prevention and correction of underachievement. A brief statement of the highlights of these reports follows.

Underachievement Results from Many Factors. Underachievement can result from many factors which in turn are related to or result from other problems. As a group, underachievers are different from achievers in many respects. For example, Cook (5) in a study of representatives of the two groups found that at the high school level, underachievers are mostly boys, are older, have a poorer attendance record, have attended more different schools, and are less well adjusted toward their school, their families, and their home. However, he concludes that no one factor or combination of factors distinguished absolutely between the two groups.

Home Backgrounds a Major Factor. Because of its important role in transmitting values and cultural heritage, the family is a major determinant of the quality of children's intellectual achievement. A study by Haggard (11) showed that high achievers among gifted students from homes that emphasized the values of learning had accepted these values at an early age. Not all homes that promote intellectual excellence among their children are successful. Sometimes the children do not accept the values of their parents and actually rebel against them; but, on the other hand, children seldom develop strong intellectual interests in the face of the opposition or apathy of their parents.

Personality Factors Important. Emotional factors sometimes interfere with pupils' learning. A study of the psychological health of gifted adolescents made within the New York City Talent Preservation Project (30) showed that 50 percent of the non-achievers had neurotic problems with which learning disorder was associated. However, the same study shows that emotional disturbance does not always block achievement. Thirty percent of the high achiever group was found to have serious emotional problems.

Correction Should Begin Early. Many writers have stressed the importance of initiating preventive and corrective programs in the early grades. Strang (p. 79-80) states that there is evidence that reading retardation of the gifted becomes cumulative from the fourth grade on, or even earlier. Impellizzeri (p. 286) considers the correction of underachievement of long standing to be extremely difficult to accomplish.

Reading Retardation Common. Reading retardation is common among underachievers. According to Schrieber, Director of the N.E.A. Project on School Drop-Outs, it is the greatest factor in school drop outs. His findings reveal that of almost one million drop-outs last year, the average student was two or more years retarded in reading. (34)

B. Implications of Research on Prevention and Correction of Underachievement

The above conclusions together with other information available from the recent NEA survey (28) of the ways in which schools throughout the United States are

endeavoring to help underachievers suggest the following to be worthwhile procedures for the prevention and correction of underachievement.

1. Provide Administrative Leadership for Program of Prevention and Correction

Strong administrative leadership in favor of a program for the prevention and correction of underachievement is necessary to its success. In their meetings with the teachers, the superintendent and principals should indicate that the district's educational philosophy gives high priority to such a program beginning in the primary grades. Authorization and support for the kinds of instructional flexibility and enrichment which such a program presupposes should be provided. An in-service program which enables teachers to acquire the understandings and skills which they need to be effective should be maintained. Furthermore, background information on the problem of underachievement and the provisions being made for its solution should be presented to the governing board from time to time.

2. Begin Program of Prevention and Correction in Early Grades

Provisions for preventing and correcting underachievement have the best chance of success if initiated early in the child's school career. The process of identifying potential and actual underachievers should be started as soon as children enter school and should be followed by provisions focussed upon preventing and overcoming serious gaps between the pupil's potential and actual achievement level. Preventive measures are generally more fruitful than those which attempt to correct or overcome deficiencies; hence, the crux of the problem lies in providing from the start an instructional program which is challenging and is effectively developmental for each pupil even though this may require departure from traditional patterns of instructional method, content, and grouping.

3. Provide for Underachievers Through Program Extensions

As one means of providing for the instructional needs of underachievers, many school districts use extensions in their regular programs such as summer schools, Saturday classes, and after-school classes. The following are illustrations of the ways this is being done in various parts of the country as reported in a recent NEA survey. (28) In each case, more detailed information can be secured by writing to the school district indicated.

a. San Diego, California provides summer-school instruction in basic skills for pupils of normal ability who are not achieving as well as they should. (28, p.7)

b. Mason City, Iowa offers a summer remedial reading program for students who are achieving in reading one year or more below their ability. (28,p.11)

c. Iowa State Teachers College offers a six weeks summer course in remedial reading in which teachers spend two hours tutoring a group of underachieving pupils and two hours in a class with an instructor. (28, p.11)

d. Daytona Beach, Florida has established an enrichment center to which children from grades 3 through 7 are transported by their parents one day

a week. Attendance is optional and the I.Q. range begins at 135. Emphasis is upon encouraging creative thought. (28, p.9)

e. Baltimore County, Maryland requires teachers to remain after school one-half hour after classes are dismissed to work with pupils requiring special help. (28, p.13)

f. The Modesto, California Board of Education offers a Saturday class program which offers high-level Instruction and advanced training in mathematics, foreign language, art, creative writing, and science. Students are selected on the basis of I.Q. level and interviews by school psychologist. (28, p.4)

4. Give Special Help to Culturally-Handicapped Children

Since children's home and community backgrounds are important determiners of their ability and readiness for learning in school, it is essential that the school provide supplemental and enriching experiences for children whose backgrounds are meager or divergent.

As suggested earlier, schools should begin to gather and record information on children's cultural background as soon as they enter school. Furthermore they should use this information in determining how the instructional program should be individualized, particularly in regard to the readiness experiences which are provided in the early grades.

To some extent, experiences which will help to overcome limitations in the child's cultural background can be provided within the regular classroom procedure; however, others will require special programs such as educational field trips, pre-school nursery programs, and pre-school parent education classes, particularly in low socio-economic areas.

Currently, many schools are trying out new ways of meeting the special educational needs of the culturally-handicapped children. A recent publication of the NEA (26) describes over forty such programs and is a good resource for school administrators that are planning such programs. It also lists the following as being the key factors upon which the effectiveness of the specific procedures and activities depend.

a. Understanding, competent teachers.

b. Well staffed pupil personnel services, with emphasis on counseling and social work.

c. A remedial reading program geared to the language and experience limitations of the children involved.

d. A flexible and varied program of special education.

e. Effective means of involving parents and securing their cooperation.

f. Enthusiastic and sustained help from community agencies and civic organizations.

Also of interest to schools is Senate Bill 115, State Aided Compensatory Education which was enacted by the 1963 California Legislature. It authorizes and to some extent subsidizes "special programs" directed to the stimulation of the cultural and educational propensities of otherwise able minor pupils whose home or community environment creates language, cultural, and economic disadvantages making it unlikely that they will complete the regular programs leading to graduation from elementary or secondary schools.

5. Provide Special Corrective Instruction

Corrective instruction for underachievers should include remedial work for some plus developmental or enrichment work for others. The following are some illustrative approaches to this two-fold problem that are being used by school districts in various parts of the nation according to an NEA report. (28)

a. Special Course in Reading is provided for the Junior and Senior high school students in the Oakland School District who are one or more years retarded in reading. The course is taught by a teacher with special strengths in teaching reading and has an enrollment of not more than 20 per class. For students who cannot schedule the course during the regular school year, it is made available in the summer session. (28, p.5)

b. Provision for reteaching retarded readers in second and third grade who fail to get a good start in reading is made in the San Diego schools. It is staffed by traveling teadhers each of whom conducts three classes of eight to twelve children in each of four schools. (38, p.6)

c. Special classes for underachieving students in the areas of social studies, mathematics, and science in the Cherry Creek School District (Englewood, Colorado). Also, special teachers in developmental reading work with children having reading problems. (28, p.7)

d. A trained reading teacher is assigned to each comprehensive junior high school in the Baltimore Schools for two half-days each week to work with pupils who have I.Q.'s of 95 or better and who test two grades or more below level in reading. (28, p.13)

e. An instructional resources center where teachers can get special equipment and material and the help of special resource teachers who do individual testing, tutoring, and suggest methods and materials to classroom teachers who have pupils with learning difficulties is available in each elementary school building in schools of University City, Missouri. (28, p.18)

f. A Rapid-learner program for pupils in grades 4, 5, and 6 who have an I.Q. of 120 or over, have a grade placement score in reading two years above actual placement, and exhibit physical, mental and social maturity is offered in the elementary schools of Lincoln, Nebraska. The program provides enrichment activities particularly in reading and language. Also, a cooperative program with the University of Nebraska provides instruction for pupils who need advanced courses and those who need remedial help. (28, p.18)

g. In West Hartford, Connecticut, pupils whose learning is hampered by emotional problems get special help from being in a special class planned to meet their particular needs. (28, p.7).

6. Provide Counseling and Guidance Services

Guidance services to help elementary and secondary school pupils meet their personal, social, and educational adjustment needs are an essential element in a corrective program for underachievers, including those whose work is acceptable for the grade but is significantly lower than their potential. Some possible ways of providing such services are indicated by the practices used in the communities indicated below, according to an NEA survey. (28)

a. In Pittsfield, Massachusetts, beginning in the junior high school, each pupil is assigned a guidance counselor who works with him for his three years in the school. Through conferences pupils get information on their achievement in relation to their ability and get suggestions on what can be done. Conferences are followed by discussions with parents. (28, p.15)

b. To acquire the information and insights needed to assist pupils in knowing themselves, making the most of their strengths and correcting or compensating for weakness, many sources are utilized by the Baltimore, Maryland Schools:

1. Conferences with individual pupils.
2. Conferences with parents and teachers.
3. Cumulative record card of each pupil.
4. Results of intelligence, achievement and aptitude tests.
5. The work of the school doctor.
6. The services of a psychologist, psychiatrist and home visitor. (28, p.13)

c. Counseling in relation to creating better study habits is provided to underachievers in the Will Rogers High School, Tulsa, Oklahoma. The plan includes supervision of the student's time through closer counselor-teacher-pupil relationship, plus conferences with parents and reports to and from home. (28, p.23)

d. In the Rutland (Vermont) High School, all students with failing grades are counseled individually for the purpose of determining causal factors and to assist in removing or diminishing blocks to learning. Counselors frequently initiate conferences which bring together parents and teachers. ( )

e. Individual counseling is provided to help students in the West Bend, Wisconsin schools become realistic in self-apparisal of potential ability and in setting long-range goals. High School counselors work closely with eighth graders who will be entering high school on orientation unit in the ninth grade which includes suggestions for improvement in study habits. (28, p.31)

f. Group Counseling can be helpful. Using such techniques as the open-ended story, role playing, and group play, the counselor structures a problem situation and then allows free participation by the group. Such activities allow children to face their fears or poor self-concepts in less threatening situations. (Miller, p.41)

7. Make Adaptations in the Curriculum

a. Modified courses in English, Social Studies, Science and Mathematics are provided in the high schools of the Cherry Creek School District of Englewood, Colorado. (28, p.7)

b. A double English period is provided on the junior high level in the schools of Volusia County, Florida. The second period is devoted to oral and written expression. (28, p.9)

c. High School Reading. Many junior and senior high schools give remedial and developmental instruction in the techniques of reading for pupils who are underperformers in this subject area. For example, the schools of Portland, Maine, provide three to five 50-minute periods of reading instrution per week for all who can profit from such work. (28, p.13)

d. Ninth Grade Arithmetic. The Oakland City Schools offer 9th grade arithmetic for students retarded two or more years in arithmetic achievement. Senior mathematics which has adult achievement in arithmetic as its goal is offered for seniors scoring between 12-0 and 14-0 on the Stanford Advanced Arithmetic Achievement test administered during the spring semester of the junior year. (28, p.5)

e. Multi-level courses. In the San Diego, California schools provision is made for teaching high school mathematics and English at several levels corresponding to the students varying levels of aptitude. The senior high school curriculum includes a reading program for students with average or above average ability. (28, p.6)

f. Acceleration. Some schools provide accelerated courses in order to challenge the more able underachievers. For example, the schools of Upper Darby, Pennsylvania place some of such pupils in accelerated junior high school courses in mathematics and science that will lead to an advance program in senior high. (28, p.26)

g. Special Curricula. The St. Louis, Missouri schools have developed special curricula for each of the five groups to which high school students are assigned, i.e., gifted, high, average, low and very low. (28, p.17)

h. Programmed Instruction. Programmed instruction, with or without machines, offers promise as a means of providing individualized instruction to help underachievers get the corrective, developmental or enrichment learning experiences they need to achieve more nearly in accord with their capacity. For example, the schools of Volusia County, Florida in cooperation with Stetson University are trying out semi-programmed text material in mathematics which makes it possible for all math students to proceed at their own learning rate. (28, p. 9)

8. Adapt Grouping Plan to Instructional Needs

For purposes of instruction, underachievers should be grouped in ways that will facilitate their learning and help the teacher. The following plans are illustrative of the ways in which various schools are endeavoring to achieve this objective.

a. Continuous Reading Growth. Grouping for continuous growth is used in the primary grades in the Bellevue, Washington Schools. Grades 1, 2, and 3 have been replaced by nine levels of reading development: reading readiness, pre-primer, primer, first reader, second reader, advanced second, third reader, advanced third reader, and enrichment. All children entering grade 1 are placed in the reading-readiness level in the fall, and grouped according to the kindergarten teacher's judgment and tests. They progress through each level at their own rate, but do not repeat. (28, p.29)

b. Transitional First Grade. In the Rigby Elementary Schools, (Rigby, Idaho) underachievers spotted during their first year spend their second year in a transitional first grade where they are given new material stressing phonics. They may go to the second or third grade the following year, depending upon their progress. (28, p.9)

c. Performance Level. The schools of Auburn, Maine are experimenting with a plan of performance grouping and team teaching. Students are grouped by achievement and ability for language arts and arithmetic and heterogeneously for social studies, music art, science, and physical education. Teachers share in the planning. (28, p.12).

d. Intra-Class Grouping. Intra-class grouping or sub-grouping within the class is used by many teachers as a way of fostering individualized learning opportunities and achievement commensurate with ability. This plan has the advantage of permitting the type of flexibility that is needed particularly in the self-contained classroom where many subjects are taught by the same teacher. Of course, its practicability depends heavily upon the total size of the class. Teachers of learge classes are limited in the number of sub-groups they can work with.

IV. Use of School and Community Resources

A. Highlights of Research on School and Community Resources

The following is a brief summary of conclusions suggested by recent reports of research, current practice, and expert opinion relating to the utilization of school and community resources for the prevention and correction of underachievement.

1. In urban centers, a large proportion of potential drop-outs is likely to come from families that already have some connection with social welfare agencies. (Potter: p.25).

2. The role of the school and the hope in causing or preventing academic underachievement remain unclear. Present evidence can be interpreted to indicate that either the home or the school or both have the basic role of causality (Shaw: p.288).

3. "The school itself is a major influence in the child's decision whether to stay in school or leave. If the child feels that the school is interested in him and wants to help him succeed, he is less likely to give up easily." (DeHaan and Kough: p.142, Vol. 2)

4. It is the responsibility of the school to identify the underachiever, the character of his underachievement, and the possible reasons for it. The immediate task thereafter, obviously, is to remedy the situation. (McCullough: p.8)

5. "If the potential drop-out can be identified before he actually leaves school, he often can be given the motivation and help he needs to continue his education." (DeHaan and Kough: p.66, Vol. 1)

6. The most significant factor in increasing a school's holding power will be the importance with which the problem is treated by the administration, the faculty and lay members of the community (Porter: p.25).

7. About one-third of the nation's schools have no in-service training programs in the field of reading (Morrison).

8. One of the greatest demotivating forces is a dull and monotonous classroom which places too much emphasis on conformity (Meeks: 31-43).

9. The in-service program must be planned around the actual problems the teachers will encounter. The teachers themselves should participate in the planning of in-service activities (Komarek: p.166).

B. Implications of Research Related to Resources for Helping Underachievers

The above summary of conclusions suggested by published reports of recent research and current practice suggests the following to be worthwhile procedures for the utilization of school and community resources for the school's program relating to underachievers.

1. Mobilize the Community's Total Resources

Underachievement including the related problems of school drop-out and the high incidence of unemployment among out-of-school youth is of concern to the total community and requires the utilization of all its related resources for helping youth. Some possible steps to this end are as follows:

a. Make an inventory of all public and private organizations in the community that, like the school, maintain programs for youth or their families. For example, develop a list of the organizations that provide service for children who have emotional problems that interfere with their school progress. Include information on the referral procedure that is required.

b. Assist in the development and maintenance of a plan for cooperative effort by all such organizations on problems affecting the education, recreation and adjustment of youth. For example, work with the welfare or social planning council of the local county or area.

c. Develop a list of persons in the community who can relate to underachievers and are willing to assist in school-related programs of prevention and correction. For example, develop a list of local persons who are willing and able to assist in providing a program of Saturday enrichment activities for local students. The local administrative unit of the national youth organizations can usually give helpful suggestions on developing such a list of resource persons.

2. Enlist the Cooperation and Help of Parents

Since the home is the origin of many of the factors which cause underachievement, it follows that the home is also an important potential resource for the prevention and correction of underachievement. The following is an illustrative list of ways in which the cooperation and help of parents might be enlisted.

a. As soon as the child enters school, begin to gather information on his home and neighborhood background.

b. Maintain a system of reporting pupil progress that includes letting parents know if and when their child is working definitely below his potential.

c. Arrange individual conferences in which parents of potential and actual underachievers and teachers can exchange information and ideas on how the school and the home can work cooperatively on a preventive and corrective program. It is recognized that some parents will be disinterested and uncooperative or they may themselves be a prime source of the difficulty. For example, they may be imposing too much pressure on the child in their effort to help him succeed.

d. Develop specific suggestions for parents on how they and the school can prevent underachievement or assure positive achievement particularly among pupils identified as potential underachievers. Also, develop similar suggestions on how the home can best support and supplement the school's corrective or remedial program for pupils identified as actual underachievers.

e. Enlist parents to serve as resources persons in the school program. For example, some schools have found parents willing to conduct evening study groups where underachievers can study under the encouragement of an interested adult.

3. Provide Adequate Staff and Materials

A major factor in determining the success of provisions for preventing and overcoming underachievement is the quality and amount of staff that is provided. The following are related suggestions:

a. Include interest and training in teaching of underachievers among the criteria used in recruiting total teaching staff.

b. Deploy staff so their strengths in teaching underachievers are effectively utilized. Limit the number and variety of pupils which the teachers must teach so they can function at their best.

c. Utilize a grouping and grade placement structure which facilitates teaching and learning as much as possible.

d. Provide an adequate supply of instructional materials including textbooks, supplementary books, visual aids (including programmed material) and library service.

4. Provide Administrative Leadership and In-service Education

Administrative leadership including related in-service education to develop an all-school concern and understanding of the problem of underachievement is essential to the success of a preventive and corrective program. The following are some factors considered to be useful in the development of in-service help to the staff.

a. Involve teachers in the planning, particularly in the identification of the practical problems which they have in relation to working with underachievers.

b. Focus the in-service program on helping teachers solve the particular problems which they identify as most serious. For the content of this program, pool and utilize the suggestions of the teachers themselves together with those which can be derived from research and current practices in other districts. In some cases, copies off this bulletin may be of value as a resource in this connection.

c. Make the in-service program a continuing one on a year-to-year basis considering the differing needs of new and experiemced teachers.

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